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VIII.—THE STORY OF DANTE'S GIANNI SCHICCHI AND REGNARD'S *LÉGATAIRE UNIVERSEL*

In the thirtieth canto of the *Inferno* we find a Florentine called Gianni Schicchi, whom Dante puts in *Malebolge* among the falsifiers for having impersonated Buoso Donati and dictated a false will. Several of the old Commentators¹ tell the story of Gianni Schicchi (sometimes Sticchi), who, though belonging to the illustrious family of the Cavalcanti, seems to have been a notoriously unscrupulous character and particularly clever at impersonation. The best account of the story is given by the so-called *Anonimo*, and runs, briefly, as follows: Messer Buoso Donati being sick with a mortal sickness, wished to make his will, inasmuch as he thought he had much to return that belonged to others. Simone, his son, delayed the old gentleman until he died. Fearing then that his father might not have left a will in his favor, he sought advice from Gianni Schicchi, who said to Simone Donati: "Have a notary come, and say that Messer Buoso wants to make a will; I will enter his bed, we will thrust him behind, I will bandage myself well, will put his night cap on my head, and will make the will as you wish." Then he added: "It is true that I want to gain by this." Simone agreed, all was done accordingly and Gianni Schicchi in a broken voice began to dictate: "I leave twenty soldi to the Church of Santa Reparata, and five francs to the Frati Minori, and five francs to the Predicatori," and thus he went on distributing for God, but very

¹ Scartazzini mentions Selmi's *Anonimo*, Dante's son Jacobus, Jac. della Lana, the *Ottimo Commento*, Benvenuto, Buti, the Cassinese and Petrus Dantis.

little money. "And I leave," he continued, "five hundred florins unto Gianni Schicchi." At that the son jumped up and said: "We must not put that in the will, father; I will give it to him as you leave it." "Simone," replied Gianni, "you will let me do with what is mine according to my judgment." Simone, out of fear, kept silent. "And I leave unto Gianni Schicchi my mule," for Messer Buoso had the finest mule in Tuscany. "Oh, Messer Buoso," said Simone to his supposed father, "this man Schicchi really does not care for your mule." At which the testator replied: "Silence, I know better than you what Gianni Schicchi wants." Simone began to wax wrathful, but out of fear he kept silent. Gianni continued to dictate: "And I leave unto Gianni Schicchi one hundred florins which are owed to me by a certain neighbor, and for the rest I leave Simone my universal heir with this clause, that unless every bequest be executed within fifteen days, the whole heredity shall go to the Convent of Santa Croce." And the notaries having departed, Gianni Schicchi got out of bed, the body of Messer Buoso was replaced in it, and Simone began bewailing his father's sudden death.

This version, which is the one usually given by modern editions of Dante, gives us more details and in a better, more finished form than any of the other old commentators. The latter I shall not stop to consider; for they have been treated before, for instance, by Professor Toldo.² It is enough to say that in its essentials the plot remains the

² Pietro Toldo, *La Frode di Gianni Schicchi*, in *Giornale Storico della Letteratura Italiana*, XLVIII, pp. 113 f. For the value of the various old commentators see C. Hegel, *Über den historischen Werth der älteren Dante-Commentare*, Leipzig, 1878. Unfortunately, Boccaccio's Commentary, which would have been most valuable, did not reach the thirtieth canto.

same,³ and that this seems to be the earliest appearance in literature of this comical and charmingly gruesome story. It is now my object to set forth the supposed sources and a few possible descendants of this story.

Concerning sources, as the Gianni Schicchi story is reported by Dante Commentators only as city gossip, and has not been proved historically true, it has been suggested⁴ that perhaps some unknown Florentine of the thirteenth century, knowing the character and inclinations of Gianni Schicchi, attributed to him a story that was much older. This conjecture is very probable because the mere motive of the substitution to dictate a will is too humanly natural not to have occurred endless times unreported by history or literature. At least in two instances, however, we *do* find a similar occurrence reported by history: First, in the

³In some of the old commentators, for instance the Cassinese, and Petrus Dantis, the old man is killed by his son and by Gianni Schicchi. This, however, as Scartazzini notes in his commentary, was unknown to Dante. Cf. Scartazzini's *Enciclopedia Dantesca*, Milano, 1896-99, pp. 896 f. Moreover, for the exact relationships of the persons implicated in the story see Isidoro del Lungo, *Una vendetta in Firenze*, in *Archivio Storico italiano*, 1886, Quarta Serie, vol. XVIII, p. 383, and also in his volume *Dal Secolo e dal Poema di Dante, Altri ritratti e studi*, Bologna, Zanichelli, 1898, p. 113. See also F. Torraca in *Rassegna Bibliografica della Letteratura italiana*, III, 1895, p. 230; and G. A. Venturi, *I Fiorentini nella Divina Commedia*, in *Rassegna Nazionale*, 16 Giugno, 1898, p. 788; who does not say enough about Gianni Schicchi.

⁴See *Bullettino della Società Dantesca*, Anno VIII (1900-1901), note at the bottom of p. 284. This was kindly brought to my attention by Professor E. G. Parodi, Editor of the *Bullettino*, in a communication published in the *Marzocco*, Sep. 28th, 1913.

Since in the course of my investigation I have followed various clues kindly given to me, I take this opportunity of thanking Professors J. D. M. Ford, C. H. C. Wright, G. L. Kittredge, A. A. Howard of Harvard University, Dr. Walther Fischer of the University of Pennsylvania, and Professor F. Baldensperger, Exchange Professor at Harvard from the University of Paris, as well as Professor Parodi of Florence.

case of Antiochus Theos, King of Syria, who "married Berenice, the daughter of the Egyptian King. This so offended his former wife Laodice, by whom he had two sons, that she poisoned him, and suborned Artemon, whose features were similar to his, to represent him as King. Artemon, subservient to her will, pretended to be indisposed, and as King called all the ministers, and recommended to them Seleucus, surnamed Callinicus, son of Laodice, as his successor. After this ridiculous imposture, it was made public that the King had died a natural death, and Laodice placed her son on the throne, and dispatched Berenice and her son, 246 years before the Christian era." ⁵ Second, we find in Suetonius's *Lives of the Cæsars*, under Nero, a law that "no person who wrote a will for another should put down in it any legacy for himself." ⁶ If the enactment of this law seemed necessary, there must have been an abuse to be remedied. This fraud must then have been prevalent in the depraved days of Imperial Rome. Though these two instances probably have no direct connection at all with our Gianni Schicchi story, they are worth noting to show that the trick had been invented long before. On the other hand, such a crafty joke as the one perpetrated by Gianni Schicchi suggests very much the ways of the jocose Florentines of the Middle Ages, whose *beffe* or practical jokes form so large a part of the Italian *novella*.

⁵ This is the story as given in Lempriere's *Classical Dictionary*, and taken from Appian's history. See also Echard's *Roman History*, conveniently translated into French by La Roque, and Gayot de Pitaval's *Causes Célèbres*, La Haye, 1738, vol. vii, p. 311, who refers to it.

⁶ I quote from *The Lives of the First Twelve Cæsars*, of C. Suetonius Tranquillus, translated by Alexander Thomson, London, 1796, p. 436.

It is strange to note, then, that this story is taken up by none of the famous old Italian story tellers. Let me remark at once that in so saying I am only talking of this particular form of story. I am not concerned with stories of mistaken identity, such as appear in the Bible, in Oriental stories, in Plautus, Boccaccio, etc.; nor with stories of peculiar wills, such as we find in French *fabliaux*, in the Italian *Novella* and in countless plots ever since; nor finally in stories of pretended sickness typified by Moliere's *Malade Imaginaire* and by its ancestors and descendants through all ages. The skeleton of the plot I am studying is: that a scoundrel gets into the bed of an old man already dead or dying, and, for the benefit of some party claiming heredity, dictates a will, which the said scoundrel, taking advantage of the situation, turns largely to his own profit.

Not until the Sixteenth Century do I find again the Gianni Schicchi type of story in Italy, and even then it is told rather poorly by two writers of *novelle*:⁷ Marco Cademosto da Lodi in the sixth of his *Novelle*⁸ (1544), and Nicolao Granucci in his *La piacevol Notte, et lieto Giorno*⁹

⁷ See John Colin Dunlop, *History of Prose Fiction*, revised by Henry Wilson, London, 1888, vol. II, pp. 191, 192, in which, however, the Gianni Schicchi version is not mentioned at all.

⁸ *Sonetti ed altre Rime con proposte e risposte di alcuni uomini degni e con alcune Novelle, Capitoli e Stanze: in Roma, per Antonio Blado Asolano, 1544.* This edition is very rare. The six stories were reprinted from the original edition, in a limited number of copies, *Novelle di Marco Cademosto da Lodi* (Milano?), MDCCXCIX, p. 70. Three of Cademosto's stories were reprinted by Girolamo Zanetti in his *Novelliero italiano*. A very brief sketch of Cademosto and a translation of the very story in question may be found in Thomas Roscoe's *The Italian Novelists*, London, 1825, vol. II, pp. 129-138.

⁹ *La piacevol Notte et lieto Giorno, Opera morale di Nicolao Granucci di Lucca, indirizzato al molto Magnifico e Nobilissimo Sig. M. Giuseppe Arnolfini, Gentilhuomo Lucchese. Venezia, appresso*

(1574). These are rather obscure writers. Cademosto was a poet, apparently lived in Rome, and held an ecclesiastical office at the Roman Court under Leo X. Six stories, rescued, as he says himself, from the sack of Rome which destroyed twenty-seven others, appeared together with his poems in a volume dedicated to Ippolito d'Este. Granucci was from Lucca, as he says himself at the beginning of his book, which he compiled from a volume given to him near Siena. The sixth story of Cademosto's book and the story that begins on page 157 of Granucci's book both tell how an old man about to die was suspected of not having bequeathed his property to his two sons, and how an old servant came to the rescue by proposing to impersonate the old man and dictate a will which would make void all previous wills, and insure the property to them. In doing this he, of course, leaves a considerable amount of money to himself.

Not only is the situation practically the same as in the Gianni Schicchi story,¹⁰ but these two Sixteenth Century versions are almost identical. For the sake of exactness I shall here enumerate the details that these two later ver-

Jacomo Vidali, 1574. See also Thoms Roscoe, *op. cit.*, vol. III, p. 225, where a very brief sketch of Granucci is given. The story here translated by Mr. Roscoe is, unfortunately, not the one in question.

¹⁰ The similarity between the Gianni Schicchi story and the Cademosto *novella* was noted by Professor Toldo, *op. cit.*, p. 117, who also noted that neither Zambrini, who published the Anonimo version (in his *Libro di Novelle antiche tratte da diversi testi del buon secolo della lingua*, in *Scelta di curiosità letterarie etc.*, disp. XCIII, nov. LXVII, p. 177) nor Reinhold Köhler (in his study *Über Zambrini's Libro di Novelle antiche*, in *Kleinere Schriften*, Ed. Bolte, Berlin, 1900, vol. II, pp. 555-569) say anything about it. I may add that Granucci is mentioned by nobody in connection with the Gianni Schicchi story, and that the latter is overlooked by Dunlop and Landau.

sions have in common, italicizing those that already appeared in the Gianni Schicchi story. 1. Same characters having identical names. 2. *The old man feels remorse for his ill-acquired riches, and wishes to make amends by making bequests to charity.* 3. *There is doubt and suspicion about his having any will.* 4. *It is an outsider, a servant who has been exactly twenty-four years in the service of the family, who suggests impersonating the old man, and writing the will.* 5. *The falsifier gets into the old man's bed, with a night cap carefully pulled over his head. The blinds are closed.* 6. *The notaries are called, the two sons remaining in the next room at the beginning of the will.* 7. *There is, however, an interruption in the dictating of the will, by one of the beneficiaries.* 8. *The falsifier leaves a goodly quantity of property to himself.* 9. *When all is done, the dead man is placed in bed again, lamentations begin for his death.* 10. The moral is that one should be generous to one's fellow-men, and particularly to old servants.

From this pedantically minute list of details the connection between the two later stories is apparent. Moreover, it is the Granucci story which derives directly from Cademosto's, because, apart from the obvious similarity and the fact that Granucci's stories came out thirty years later than Cademosto's, Granucci said himself, at the beginning of his book, that he merely rewrote some stories ¹¹ told him by a monk near Siena, who handed to him, about 1568, a volume containing them: "*me ne diede un compendio co' versi, Sonetti, Capitoli e Stanze . . .*" And in fact the title of Cademosto's book is exactly: *Son-*

¹¹ The imitative inclination of Granucci was noted by Landau in his *Beiträge zur Geschichte der italienischen Novelle*, Wien, 1875, p. 98.

etti ed altre rime . . . con alcune Novelle, Capitoli e Stanze. . . . When this detail is added to the rest of the evidence, the derivation of Granucci from Cademosto can hardly be longer doubted.

A peculiar coincidence is here to be noted: Granucci knew his Dante, for he quotes freely from the *Inferno*. He then had surely seen the name of Gianni Schicchi, and might well have read the story from an old Commentary. But if he did, his version does not show the fact. All it shows is unadulterated copying from Cademosto.

Now comparing the Cademosto and Granucci stories as one to the *Anonimo* version, we see that though some details have changed, the story is practically the same, but not as good. Indeed, it has lost its brevity, its freshness, and much of its wit. For instance, a few comical details are overlooked by the *novellieri*: the impersonator does not bequeath with ironical meanness several trifling sums to the Church (a detail, by the way, which is not taken up at all in later versions); nor does he give himself gradually several different properties—a detail that furnishes comical suspense; the sons are not present in the very room at the time he begins to dictate the will, so that we miss the comical embarrassment of the situation due to their forced silence; finally, when they do complain to the false testator for his egotistic prodigality, the latter does not come out, as he does so charmingly in Gianni Schicchi, with the remark (talking about himself): “I know better than you what Gianni Schicchi wants.” The detail that the sons are two instead of one, adds nothing to the plot, and the fact that the villain is not a stranger but the old family servant may have been brought in for the sake of that weak moral, which looks like an after-thought, anyhow. The crafty servant, moreover, is not an infrequent character in the *novella*.

Now if we assume, as we may, that Cademosto's main object was to amuse, it does not seem likely that he had before him the Gianni Schicchi story. And setting aside Cademosto's assertion at the end of his last story that the things he tells actually happened, I am rather inclined to suspect that he retold a story that was already in popular tradition. To sum up, then, I conjecture that the story of the falsified will was probably told popularly before it was settled on Gianni Schicchi, and having received literary form through Dante's Commentators, again entered tradition¹² (particularly perhaps at the time when the Divine Comedy began to lose popular favor), and was gathered in a somewhat changed and weakened form by Cademosto, whose version Granucci rewrote.

So far as I have been able to ascertain, this story does not occur again in Italian literature. It plays, however, an important part in French literature, where it first appears in 1708 as the central episode of *Le Légataire Universel*, which is generally considered the best play of Regnard.¹³ In fact, in Act IV, Scene 6, we have the same in-

¹² Professor Werner Söderhjelm, of the University of Helsingfors, the learned author of *La Nouvelle Française au XVème Siècle*, would probably not agree with me in this; for he kindly writes me that he considers the Schicchi story to be as true as some of the Sacchetti stories, and that he does not think it came into oral tradition. His opinion is most valuable, but perhaps he had not taken into account the Cademosto-Granucci versions.

¹³ It is interesting to note that though most critics speak of it in terms of praise, Brunetière gives it no credit for originality by calling it (in his *Hist. de la Litt. franc. classique*, Paris, 1904-12, Vol. III, pp. 19, 20.) "*une combinaison du Malade Imaginaire, des Fourberies de Scapin et de Monsieur de Pourceaugnac*"; Claretie (in his *Hist. de la Litt. franc.*, Paris, 1907, Vol. III, p. 334) just calls it a "curieuse comédie de gaité un peu macabre"; and Jules Janin (in his *Hist. de la Litt. dramatique*, Paris, 1855, Vol. II, p. 354) puts it still more strongly by saying: "*Dans cette comédie abominable, si*

cident of the falsified will. To be sure, the plot has undergone some changes. The rich old man insists on marrying a young girl who is loved by his nephew, but whom the latter could not take away from his uncle without being disinherited. Besides the scheming manservant there is the equally scheming servant girl. Thus when the old gentleman, the disposal of whose property keeps everybody wondering, happens to collapse, the crafty servant Crispin suggests the impersonation and carries it out splendidly, making handsome bequests to himself, and even to Lisette, the servant girl, provided she will become his lawful wife. Another new element brought in by Regnard is that behind this rascally trick of Crispin there is apparently a noble end, which is the bringing together of two lovers, kept apart by the whims and stinginess of the old man. This adds the attribute of hypocrisy to our already well provided villain. The final *dénouement* is also changed, and for the worse, it seems to me. For after the false will is made, the old gentleman turns out to be quite alive, having merely suffered a temporary swoon. The heirs then, guided by the wily servant Crispin, convince him that during his "lethargy" he did dictate that very will, and he, finally convinced by the unanimous protestations of all present, lets it stand. This is not a very plausible *dénouement*, and though it forms the most important scene in what is generally called the masterpiece of Regnard, it

vous en ôtez l'esprit, la verve et la gaité, tout ce qui n'appartient pas au gibet appartient à l'apothicaire. Jamais sujet plus triste et cependant jamais sujet plus rempli de gros rire n'avait été inventé; jamais, que je sache, on n'avait fait d'un cercueil un tréteau plus plaisant." Note here that if M. Janin had had in mind Regnard's sources he probably would not have used the word "inventé," nor been so emphatic with his "jamais." Most of these critics give us their own opinion of the play and hardly ever mention the creative originality of the work. Perhaps they are right, though incomplete.

is not convincing, and in subtleness of climax leaves indeed much to be desired.

Concerning the sources of this scene of the *Légataire Universel*, a good deal has been said. There are at least three theories: the first derives it directly from Dante's Gianni Schicchi;¹⁴ the second from Cademosto's story;¹⁵ the third from a fact supposed to have actually occurred in France a few years before Regnard's birth, and reported to him at Bruxelles where he went in 1681.

¹⁴ It is, of course, but a natural coincidence that the Gianni Schicchi story should use the very words "reda universale"; for that is the legal term. Farinelli in a work that practically sums up all previous studies on the subject, *Dante e la Francia*, Milan, Hoepli, 1908, Vol. II, p. 302, in a note, says that the similarity between Gianni Schicchi and the *Légataire Universel* had been noted in France by three Dante scholars of the eighteenth century, namely: Moutonnet de Clairfons, who published a translation of the Divine Comedy in 1776, and who, though mentioning Regnard's play in connection with Dante, states that Regnard took his subject from a contemporary occurrence (see his *Enfer*, p. 515); then Rivarol, whose translation of Dante appeared in 1785 (see *Oeuvres*, III, p. 253); and finally Le Prevost d'Exmes, who wrote a *Vie . . . de Dante*, in 1787, in which he actually states that Regnard's story was taken from Dante (see his p. 94). A short and futile article on this source was published by Mr. Roger Peyre in the *Supplément* of the *Journal des Débats* for Dec. 1, 1912. The writer was unaware of previous studies and made no contribution at all to the subject. Another flimsy article was published under the title of *Coincidenze* by Giovanni Rabizzani in the *Marzocco* of August 31, 1913, which I answered in the *Marzocco* of Sep. 28, and of Nov. 16, 1913.

¹⁵ The one scholar who has contributed real information on this subject is Professor Toldo, of Turin. He was not the first, however, to note the parallel Cadamosto-Regnard, since it was mentioned at least in the edition of Regnard by Garnier Frères, Paris, 1901(?), p. xiii. (Several books on Regnard and editions of his works are inaccessible to me). It was then treated more fully by Prof. Toldo in his *Études sur le théâtre comique français du Moyen Age*, in *Studj di Filologia romanza* pubblicati da E. Monaci e C. De Lollis, Torino, Loescher, Vol. IX, 1903, pp. 356-358; and in 1906 in his article in the *Giornale Storico* mentioned before.

The one argument against the Gianni Schicchi theory is that it looks unlikely that Regnard should have been sufficiently familiar with Dante to find this story in one of the old Commentators. Regnard had doubtless learned Italian in his adventurous meanderings in Italy; and felt not the slightest hesitation in borrowing plots, as is shown by his *Menechmes*.¹⁶ The one argument in favor is that besides corresponding in general plot, the Gianni Schicchi story and the *Légataire Universel* coincide in several details, such as the false testator's wearing of a large night cap, and his remark when told by the nephew that Crispin is a rascal not worthy of any bequest: "Je connais ce Crispin mille fois mieux que vous." But it is manifestly unfair to a writer of Regnard's calibre not to think him capable of inventing such details. His chief merit was to wring out of a given subject every drop of humor it contained. To cause laughter was the main philosophy of Regnard's work.

The similarity with the Cademosto story is about the same. Regnard has the crafty servant do the trick, and in some details agrees with Cademosto. If Regnard saw the Cademosto version he certainly could not have failed to notice the possibilities of the plot and the feeble way in which they were neglected. Moreover, there is in favor of the Cademosto theory the fact that Italian stories were very popular in France, and that they were very freely used in both French stories and plays; and finally the opinion of Toldo and Farinelli. But if my conjecture that Cademosto derived ultimately from Dante's Gianni Schic-

¹⁶ See Toldo's *Études sur le théâtre comique* . . . mentioned before, and also his excellent *Études sur le théâtre de Regnard*, in *Revue d'histoire littéraire de la France*, x, p. 1. For Regnard's life see the account of Guido Menasci, in his rather inadequate *Nuovi saggi di Letteratura francese*, Livorno, 1908.

chi is correct, it will not make much difference whether Regnard got his idea from Dante or Cademosto, the fact is that even in small details here is the same old story, coming in a vague but plausible sequence from the thirteenth century to the early eighteenth.

The third theory, that Regnard took his plot from an actual occurrence, is the most peculiar of all. It was first launched by a certain obscure dramatist of the eighteenth century called Fenouillot de Falbaire, who wrote a tragedy, *Les Jammabos ou les moines japonais*,¹⁷ a rabid satire on the Jesuits, at the end of which, among various notes, he has one referring to Regnard's *Légataire* and giving its *real* source, which is a fact that actually occurred, says he, in the Franche Comté. Here is the story,¹⁸ briefly:

An old landowner of Besançon to whom the Jesuit brothers of that city paid covetous attentions, having to make a trip to Rome, received from them a letter to their Roman brethren recommending him as a friend whose riches and age made him attractive. This old gentleman, whose exact name was Antoine-François Gauthiot, Seigneur d'Ancier, reached Rome and the Jesuits, but almost immediately got sick and died. Great desolation among the Jesuits. Fortunately, however, one of the monks who had been to Besançon, remembered seeing there a peasant who greatly resembled M. Gauthiot. This monk was sent post-haste to Besançon, where he found the peasant, Denis Euvrard, and told him to come at once to Rome where the

¹⁷ Published anonymously and undated at London—certainly not before 1778, and probably not much later.

¹⁸ This story may also be found in the *Œuvres de J. F. Regnard*, by M. Garnier, Paris, Lequien, 1820, Vol. iv, pp. 15 f. The fact that Regnard took his plot from an actual occurrence is also suggested in the *Dictionnaire portatif des théâtres*, in an article on the *Légataire*.

Seigneur d'Ancier lay sick in bed, eager to see him in order to bequeath to him a large farm. The peasant did not hesitate a moment, and set out. As soon as he arrived in Rome he received the shocking news that old M. d'Ancier had just died, his last words being that he meant to leave his large farm to Euvrard, and the rest of his property to the Jesuit Brethren. Indeed, said the monks, though his will was not actually written, that was a mere formality; for the old gentleman had repeatedly expressed his wishes before God, and these wishes ought to be respected. Arguing thus, it did not take them long to persuade Euvrard to impersonate the old man. Euvrard acquiesced gladly, went so far as to rehearse the part several times with the monks, and then at the crucial moment bequeathed to *himself* the large farm agreed upon plus a mill, a small forest, a fine vineyard, his choice of the best income-paying real estate in Besançon, all the moneys owed on the farm, and finally five hundred francs for his poor little niece! The reverend fathers were left dumfounded and choking with anger. Still, he bequeathed to them all the rest of his property, with the obligation to build a church, wherein a daily service could be celebrated for the repose of his soul. Now when Euvrard reached old age and was himself on the point of death he was suddenly seized by remorse, and confessed this old imposture to his priest. He was at once ordered to return the money to the rightful heirs, which he did, then proceeded to die in peace, leaving the heirs and the Jesuits to fight out the bequest. Law suits were carried through three courts to the final victory of the Jesuit brothers. These facts, says Falbaire, are attested by documents.

I have investigated this.¹⁹ Through the kindness of

¹⁹ This question had been looked into before; see T. de Loray, *Le Légataire de Regnard et les Jésuites*, in *Revue des questions histo-*

Professor Baldensperger, I received a letter of introduction to an eminent lawyer at Besançon, M. Paul Lerch, who most kindly undertook to look up this affair, and after searching the archives wrote to me that the law suits undoubtedly did happen in 1629, but that the story of the previous impersonation is nowhere even mentioned. It is a fact, though, that the Jesuits built their "Collège de Besançon" with the money that came from the estate of M. d'Ancier whom "they had made to testate after his death, by proxy."²⁰ This fact alone would have been enough to suggest to anyone who had previously seen one of the Italian versions of the story or the *Légataire*, to tack it on to this true incident of M. d'Ancier and make a good story of it. This might have been done by Fenouillot himself, who apparently is the first to report it, or he may merely have reported a story well known about Besançon, and invented long before. At all events it certainly looks as if that peculiar bequest of d'Ancier, which occasioned so many law suits, and the gossip inseparable from such things, might well have occasioned the coupling of the old story to an actual episode. Of course, we must not forget that Fenouillot had a personal detestation for the Jesuits, whose Order at the time of his writing had been abolished, so that there could be no official denial of his story; nor must we forget that even if Fenouillot got his story from popular rumor, he could well model it on the

riques, Vol. VII (1869), pp. 614 f., who adds: "Le récit de cette histoire est reproduit jusqu'en 1860, dans le travail que deux érudits bisontins consacrent à la description de leur ville natale, et plus récemment encore, la *Revue Germanique* s'en empare . . . sous la rubrique A. M. D. G." While deploring the vagueness of such references, I may state that it was M. Droz of Besançon, who with scholarly fairness examined this question.

²⁰ See T. de Loray, *op. cit.*, p. 616.

Légataire. All this made me wonder whether this tale ever belonged to popular lore, and whether there were other examples of such a plot being acted out in actual life. For the first question, though some critics insist that Regnard's story contains the typical "esprit gaulois," and that as such it probably belonged to the *fabliau* type of mediæval literature, so far as I know there is no such plot in the *fabliaux*, nor in French tales. Professor Toldo, who is an expert on the subject, also looked for it in vain. As to actual occurrences in France, I found a few which, for the sake of curiosity, I think worth reporting. One is given in the *De l'Art de la Comédie*²¹ by Cailhava, who says, talking of the *Légataire*: "Quant au fond de la comédie, Regnard n'a fait que mettre en action une aventure arrivée dans le Languedoc. La voici:

Histoire véritable.

Un gentilhomme campagnard étoit a toute extrémité; il envoie chercher un Notaire dans une ville voisine pour écrire le testament qu'il veut faire en faveur de la femme la plus vertueuse, la plus fidelle. Mais, hélas! dépêché un peu trop vite par un Médecin fort expéditif, il prend congé de la compagnie avant d'avoir dicté ses dernières volontés. La veuve jette les hauts cris, quand le précepteur de ses enfans, qui l'avait aidée dans le particulier à soutenir publiquement le caractère de prude, et qui l'avoit souvent consolée des infirmités de son mari, trouve le secret de la consoler encore de sa mort précipitée. Il enlève le défunt, le transporte dans un autre lit, se met à sa place, attend le Garde-note, avec les rideaux bien fermés, et, d'une voix mourante, dicte un testament, par lequel il laisse unique légataire sa chère épouse. Ce titre convenoit à la Dame, a quelques formalites près!"

Now here is undeniably the "esprit gaulois!" The author then adds an interesting remark: "L'aventure que je viens de rapporter est très-vraisemblable dans toutes

²¹ (Jean François) de Cailhava (d'Estendoux), *De l'Art de la Comédie*, Paris, 1786, II, pp. 406, 407.

ses circonstances ; il est même à parier que dans les campagnes elle se renouvelle souvent, parce qu'une telle fourberie peut s'exécuter avec beaucoup de facilité : cependant, transportée sur la scène le principe de l'action manque de vraisemblance."

A somewhat similar occurrence is told by Pitaval in his *Causes Célèbres*.²² Here the victim is a poor old widow, Françoise Fontaine, of Bordeaux, who, hypnotised by a most unscrupulous ruffian, was persuaded to make some bequests in his favor. But before making a regular will she died. This did not disconcert Quiersac, the above-mentioned ruffian, in the least, for he at once found Guillemette Rainteau, a woman extremely poor, in worldly goods as well as in moral scruples, who was ready to help him, and together with another worthy they planned to have Guillemette dictate a will according to their pleasure. When the two notaries were present and the pseudo-Françoise was asked to express her last wishes, she began, with her face turned to the wall and with a hoarse and broken voice, by leaving three thousand francs to herself. Says Pitaval:²³ "Il n'y a pas apparence qu'elle voulut imiter la Comédie de Regnard . . ." and then he actually quotes three pages of the *Légataire* before coming back to the crafty pair. This affair got the two notaries suspiciously implicated, but finally, innocence asserting itself, the guilty were condemned, and Pitaval, after sermonizing on the frequently wicked influence of the stage, comes to the philosophical and resigned conclusion that this crime "est une ancienne fourberie ; on ne soupçonnera pas les acteurs de cette intrigue criminelle de l'avoir imitée d'après les exemples de l'histoire, il y a apparence qu'ils l'ignoroient :

²² *Op. cit.*, pp. 279 f., in the chapter called *La Fausse Testatrice*.

²³ *Op. cit.*, p. 285.

mais le cœur de l'homme est le même dans tous les tems, la cupidité lui suggere les mêmes expédiens et les mêmes artifices pour venir à ses fins."

As late as the nineteenth century we find an echo of the *Légataire* story in a rather unexpected place: the *Mémoires d'un Touriste* of Stendhal.²⁴ Here under date of Nivernais, the 20th of April, (1837), Stendhal says that he heard one evening in a beautiful castle the following story, which actually occurred to a local notary, M. Blanc. One night this notary, who was caution personified, and perpetually afraid of getting into trouble, was called with an associate, to write the will of an old man who was so near death as to have completely lost his speech. The notary therefore wrote the will under the direction of the old man's daughter there present (the son was in another part of the country), and at each bequest received from the moribund gentleman an emphatic nod of approval. It so happened that in the midst of this ceremony a stray hound entered the room barking wildly, and upset everything. In the attempt to run the beast out the notary unconsciously dropped his handkerchief. As soon as the dog was gone, the will was completed, and the notaries dismissed. On his way out our friend M. Blanc saw his handkerchief, and stooping to pick it up noticed under the bed two legs. He was too dismayed to speak, but as soon as he reached the street he reported the fact to his associate. A long discussion followed as to whether they should go upstairs and investigate these two legs, at the risk of incurring the enmity of Madame, or not. For Madame was socially very prominent—which worried the cautious M. Blanc dread-

²⁴ De Stendhal (Henry Beyle), *Mémoires d'un Touriste*, Paris, 1854, pp. 43-47. This parallel was discovered by Mr. Rabizzani, who reported it in the above mentioned article in the *Marzocco*.

fully. But they resolved to return upstairs, ostensibly to enquire about the old man's health. Madame received them coldly and said that her father, fatigued by the ceremony, was asleep. The crestfallen notaries returned downstairs, re-argued the matter at length, and finally, mustering their united boldness, resolutely decided to make a second inquiry. Madame received them still more coldly and said that her father was fully as fatigued and as much asleep as twenty minutes ago. On this trip, however, the embarrassed M. Blanc had time to peek under the bed, where he saw . . . nothing. And he left the house for the third time, still wondering: why those legs? Finally, the two worried notaries determined to take all risks and report the matter to the police, among whom was a young Parisian officer who, upon hearing the case, exclaimed at once: "Why, this is the scene of Regnard's *Légataire*, let me go to the house immediately." As soon as Madame saw the gendarme appear she fainted; and her husband, pressed by the threatening speeches of the officer, soon confessed that his father-in-law having died that very morning, rather than see the estate divided, they had put a trusted peasant under the bed, had taken two slats out, made a hole in the mattress, through which he could thrust his hands and appropriately regulate the nods of the old man. Then Stendhal, in his characteristic manner, adds: "J'ai oui citer dans mon voyage plusieurs faits semblables; souvent, dans les petites villes, il y a des soupçons, mais, au bout de deux ou trois mois, on parle d'autres choses. Ce qui est important en pareille occurrence, c'est d'éloigner les chiens."

Here, then, the story, somewhat changed, though still connected with Regnard's comedy, seems to be in popular tradition. Note that Stendhal suggests having heard similar tales in other places, and also that the Nivernais is not

very far from Besançon, both being north of the Languedoc.

Before leaving Regnard I must say a couple of words about the *Légataire* as a literary source in itself. It was in fact imitated at least twice. Professor Toldo²⁵ mentions an old German scenario of a curious *commedia dell'arte* called: *Anselmo der Kranke in der Einbildung oder Das durch List erzwungene Testament*. As he notes, this play has the stock characters of the improvised plays, Anselmo, Colombina, etc., and among them Hans Wurst, which is the German name for the famous *Zanni*. Of course it is nothing more than a meaningless coincidence that the original hero of our story should be named Gianni. Let me note also that Regnard's impostor, Crispin, exactly performs the two usual functions of the traditional *Zannis* of the *Commedia dell'Arte*: namely, getting money out of a stingy old man, and bringing together the pining lovers. It is interesting to find some connection between this story and the *Commedia dell'Arte*, because, knowing how closely Regnard had been connected with the Italian players in Paris—he even wrote several comedies for them—it looks alluringly possible that Regnard should have got from the Italians a hint of this plot of the counterfeit will. Had this been true, the Italians would very plausibly have got their material from the Cademosto-Granucci story, directly from a Dante Commentary or from hearsay. Unfortunately, however, no trace has been found of this plot in the *Commedia dell'Arte*.²⁶

²⁵ See his above mentioned article in the *Gior. Stor. d. lett. ital.*, 1906, p. 123 in a foot note, where he refers to A. Von Weilen, *Eine deutsche Stegreifkomödie*, in *Bausteine zur roman. Phil., Festgabe für A. Mussafia*, Halle, 1905, pp. 108-116.

²⁶ Professor Toldo, who is so familiar with this subject, also searched in vain, and Miss Winifred Smith, of Vassar, who published the excellent book *The Commedia dell'Arte*, (New York, 1912),

Another imitation of Regnard occurs in England. Thomas King, a prominent actor of Garrick's time, wrote a farce entitled *Wit's Last Stake*,²⁷ also called *A Will and No Will*. On the back of the title page is written: "*Le Légataire Universel*, A French Comedy, which furnished many materials for this little piece, may be found among the works of Monsieur Regnard." As a matter of fact it not only "furnished many materials" but everything, for King's "dramatic trifle," as he calls it himself, is nothing but a direct translation, with a few slight changes and a little re-arrangement of scenes, of those parts of the *Légataire* which contain our story. To be exact, King used the following scenes of Regnard: Act I, Sc. 1-9; Act II, Sc. 8; Act III, Sc. 10; Act IV, Sc. 2, 6-8; Act V, Sc. 4. Thomas King²⁸ was an excellent actor, a merry gambler, a friend of Sheridan and Hazlitt (the latter mentions him in his *Dramatic Essays*), and a very interesting personality, but as a dramatist he had nothing to say. This is, therefore, not much of a contribution to literature. King

kindly writes to me that she does not remember ever running into this kind of plot. Nor do I find it even mentioned in such works as Agresti's *Studii sulla Commedia italiana del secolo XVI*, Napoli, 1871, or G. Pellizzaro's *La Commedia del secolo XVI e la novellistica anteriore e contemporanea in Italia*, Vicenza, 1901.

²⁷ Thomas King, *Wit's Last Stake, a farce, as it is performed at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane*, London, 1769. This has not been reprinted and is rather rare.

²⁸ For more information on King see D. E. Baker's *Biographia Dramatica*, London, 1812, Vol. I, part 2, pp. 435-440 and the *Dictionary of National Biography*.

As this study is going to press I note a little article by Georges Roth, *Une adaptation anglaise du Légataire Universel*, in *Revue d'Histoire littéraire de la France*, Janv.-Mars, 1914, pp. 174 ff., in which he discusses this very play by Thomas King. I am glad to see that in his criticism of this farce Mr. Roth agrees with the opinions I here express.

adds nothing to the *Légataire* episode. On the contrary, feeling obliged once or twice to expurgate Regnard, whose humor is notoriously pretty coarse, he makes this English farce much less effective than the French.

I do not think there are other adaptations of the *Légataire*.

The best version of the story in English, and probably the wittiest in any language, is that given by Charles Lever, in *The Confessions of Con Cregan* (1848), a kind of fantastic biography of a rogue. The very first chapter contains the very same Gianni Schicchi story, told in Lever's cleverest humor. With typically Irish style, Lever adds to the elements of the original story, the *Leitmotiv* of whisky. Each time the cheated heir grumbles at the bequests that the impostor is making to himself, the latter begins to cough desperately, and as if he were choking his last, mumbles: "I am getting wake; just touch my lips again with the jug," . . . and here the dying man took a very hearty pull, and seemed considerably refreshed by it. After which, in a still more mournful voice, he added: "Ah, Peter, Peter, you watered the drink!"

Apparently Lever got his plot from one of the Dante Commentaries,²⁹ though he does not say so, nor do his biographers.³⁰ Lever lived for a long time in Italy, in Flor-

²⁹ This had been noticed by W. W. Vernon, see his *Readings on the Inferno of Dante*, Vol. II, p. 499, in a foot-note.

³⁰ E. Downey in his *Charles Lever, His Life in his Letters*, London, 1906, pp. 287, 288, publishes a letter of Lever dated Bagni di Lucca, Jan. 20th (1849?) in which he says: ". . . Have you received *Con Cregan*? Of course its paternity was plain to you." Here Lever is obviously referring to the authorship of the whole book, however, and not to the source of the first chapter. In another letter (p. 291) he remarks "*Con Cregan* is a secret, and I hope it will remain so. It is atrociously careless and ill-written, but its success depending on what I know to be its badness, my whole aim has been to write

ence, Genoa, Lucca, and was British consul at Trieste; so that it is very probable that he should have seen the Gianni Schicchi story. Needless to say that he took full advantage of his source, and neglected none of the humorous possibilities of the original.

I have found no other versions of this plot in English literature.³¹ But Lever's excellent short story was recently dramatized by Mr. Leonard Hatch, for the Harvard Dramatic Club, which presented it successfully under the

down to my public." This is not very clear information. W. J. Fitzpatrick in *The Life of Charles Lever*, London, 1879, Vol. II, p. 169, says: "*Con Cregan* . . . was undertaken at the suggestion of the 'same old school-fellow' of whom Lever makes honourable mention in his Preface to *The Daltons*. 'I happened at the time,' writes Major D—, 'to get a Spanish version of *Gil Blas*, which I preferred very much to the original French; and I wrote to Lever saying so, and adding that he ought to try something in the *Gil Blas* style. It was while he was living at Bregenz . . . It was a regular pot-boiler. *Con Cregan* was therefore a failure." I find nothing more definite than that concerning Lever's sources, and I do not find this story in *Gil Blas*.

³¹ Jonson's *Volpone* has really no connection with the plot in question. I am at a loss to explain why Eugenio Camerini, in his *Divina Commedia*, Milano, 1887, p. 240, commenting on Gianni Schicchi, should quote from *The Rival Twins* of George Farquhar. This play has not the slightest connection with the Gianni Schicchi story, no more than dozens of will-plots. Much closer is the parallel kindly suggested to me by Professors J. W. Cunliffe and J. Erskine, of Columbia University, namely, Thomas Hardy's story called *Netty Sargent's Copyhold* in his *Life's Little Ironies*. Here a young girl places the body of her uncle, who had just died intestate, on a chair by a table and pretending to guide his feeble hand actually signs a will in her own favor, while the notary, who is kept out of the room, watches the scene from the garden, and then ratifies the will. For a similar case, which actually happened, see Maurice Méjan, *Recueil des Causes Célèbres*, Paris, 1810, Vol. IX, pp. 13 f. But as such stories do not have the element of impersonation and mercenary dictation of a false will, they strictly cannot be included in my study.

title of *The Heart of the Irishman* in 1909.³² Finally, I see that in Paris, at the Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier, a play was given at the beginning of February entitled *Le Testament du père Leleu*, in three acts, by Martin du Gard,³³ which has this same old plot. Here again an old peasant dies, succumbing to an overdose of "eau-de-vie" given by his maid, who then calls in a neighbor to make a counterfeit will. This worthy neighbor makes a clean sweep of the situation by bequeathing the whole of the old farmer's property to himself, and upon the departure of the notary, jumps out of the window to escape the rage of the servant girl, who is left to weep out her despair "on the bed which had been the scene of her double disappointment."³⁴

It would seem from the foregoing examples that though this story does not actually belong to folk-lore,³⁵ it may well have been in popular tradition, especially in France. I hear that it is told also in Sicily. Of course, I make no claims to having exhausted the subject. Indeed, such studies as these, spreading over all literatures, are naturally inexhaustible, and I shall be glad to see others add to the material here for the first time gathered together.

³² Professor W. A. Neilson, in criticizing this play for *The Harvard Crimson*, said, "It was a pretty piece of pathos with a bit of delightful farce in the middle . . . the central situation was uproariously funny." This play is still unpublished. Another unpublished one-act play, taken directly from Gianni Schicchi, and called *The Shearer of Sheep*, was written in 1910, without the slightest knowledge of Mr. Hatch's, by Mr. Karl Schmidt, of New York, and myself.

³³ See *Journal des Débats, Revue Hebdomadaire*, Feb. 13th, 1914, p. 257 f.

³⁴ This play was briefly reported by *The Boston Herald* of March 8th.

³⁵ I do not find anything even similar to it in such works, for instance, as W. A. Clouston's *Popular Tales and Fictions*, or in J. A. Macculloch's *The Childhood of Fiction*.

From which it also appears that whether the plot in question ever belonged to tradition or not, it has most probably been acted out in real life, at various times and places, and has given occasion in at least three different literatures to excellent bits of fiction. It is interesting to note, then, in this new example, how constant is the intermingling of fact and fiction—which is the same as saying, of life and literature. So that such a search for literary parallels is not a futile quest of petty plagiarisms, but rather a miniature study of a human motive—so human, indeed, as to subsist in various countries for centuries. Let me note also how Dante, who occasioned the first literary manifestation of this story, was the only one to take it *au tragique*, by putting its crafty hero in the depths of hell's torments for his sinful impersonation. And, strange contrast indeed, it is ultimately this obscure sinner of Dante's *Inferno* who becomes in literature the prototype of clownish craftiness, the merry hero of stories and farces that have amused people from the thirteenth century to our very days.

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